

## Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping

# The GreenMan



## Garden Catalogs Promise a Horticultural Heaven

Just as holiday catalog deliveries are waning, gardeners' mailboxes fill with dozens of seed and garden catalogs bursting with gleaming copper obelisks, Chinese Giant Peppers and a host of tantalizing plants, tools and often wacky products.

Garden catalogs can be the remedy for winter blues. Just turn a few pages and encounter luscious blueberries while the Arctic winds of winter howl. Pick up another catalog and the folks at Van Bourgondien will dazzle you with their "dinner plate" dahlias, each rainbow-tinted bloom larger than a cherubic child's head.

Mail order catalogs also can be important tools for the aspiring horticulturist seeking colorful dwarf conifers, heirloom vegetables, or disease resistant plant cultivars. Local garden centers, despite fine reputations and choice offerings, never can match the variety of plant and garden materials available through catalogs and Internet sources.

At one time, Barbara Barton's *Gardening by Mail: A Source Book*, served as an unparalleled

guide to mail-order garden suppliers. Now in its fifth edition, it is hard-challenged by numerous compendia of catalogs online. *GardenGuides.com* is a typical site that provides extensive listings of catalogs, ranging from traditional sources, such as Burpee, Park Seeds and Stokes Seeds, to specialty growers and suppliers, like Seeds of Change, Antique Rose Emporium, and Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants. After all, who can

hold a bulb to Bobba-Mike's Garlic Farm, with 38 different strains of organically grown gourmet garlic? And your local nursery can never hope to rival the bloodthirsty inventory of Cook's Carnivorous Plants.

If there is a niche to be filled, there is a catalog (or 10) available. For example, tomatoes are a mainstay of most vegetable gardens. Catalogs like *Totally Tomatoes* offer 80 pages of selections, from Big Zac Hybrids, with



fruits weighing in at four to six pounds each, to Micro Tom Hybrids, a six-inch tall plant covered with pea-size fruits.

Gardeners who favor tasty and unique landscapes have long found a champion in Mike McConkey's Edible Landscapes, where hedges can be grown from currants and jostaberries, arbors covered by maple-red leafed Russian kiwis and entryways brightened by Regent Juneberries. Similarly, Nichols Garden Nursery features a catalog of seeds, live herb plants and other gourmet materials specifically grown for the gastronomic gardener.

Some of the most stunning catalogs come from upscale nurseries like Bluestone Perennials, Logee's Greenhouses, Wayside Gardens, and White Flower Farm. Each brilliant page is a siren call to rip up that boring old lawn and replace it with sweeping perennial beds shimmering with ruby, pink, and purple asters, or living mounds of white, salmon, and vermilion dianthus hybrids.

Catalogs range in feel and style as much as in plant or product selections. *R.H. Shumway's Illustrated Garden Guide* is an oversize publication rich in tradition, where engraved plate illustrations harken back to the company's origins 133 years ago. More homespun and academically-oriented nurseries like Garden

Medicinals and Culinaries only print a catalog every several years and rely on black-and-white photocopied updates to announce the availability of endangered species like Blue Cohosh, sweet-scented Vanilla Grass, or Black Hollyhocks from pre-1830.

Naturally, gardens require more than seeds and plants. The multi-billion dollar world of garden equipment supplies — offering hose reels, garden carts, and do-it-yourself greenhouses — includes respected firms like Gardener's Eden and Smith and Hawken. A less expensive and personal favorite, Gardener's Supply Company, long famous for its compost bins, planters, garden ornaments, and seed-starting supplies, offers a catalog echoing its corporate mantra of non-toxic pest control and organic gardening techniques.

Of course, Gardener's Supply is in good company with Garden's Alive, Necessary Organics, and a host of firms dedicated to resource conservation and environmental solutions to pests and other problems.

The world of garden accessories has some distinctly kitschy byways. Upscale catalogs offer Parisian street lamps, topiary forms, plantation grown teak furnishings, or enameled Mexican chimenea, while further down the rabbit hole we find garden sculpture crafted from dried cow

manure, human-scale outdoor chess sets, faux marble statuary, vinyl balustrades, and the Amazing Floating Gazebo that "appears to float in your yard!"

With a new gardening season on its way, consider some of the creative possibilities just a few catalog pages, mouse-clicks, and credit card charges away. Surprise mom on Mother's Day with a Clara Barton Redbud from the Historic Trees Nursery, a hand-painted hummingbird feeder, or perhaps a miniature tree rose from Tiny Petals Nursery. And water conservation efforts — a noble undertaking — need not leave you feeling high and dry if you want to treat yourself to the catalog of High Country Gardens, which offers hundreds of drought tolerant, xeriscape plants, along with simple design plans.

Catalogs can help you go solar, with solar-powered sprays for fountains, walkway lighting, or patio accent lights. They can help you save water with rain barrels and drip irrigation supplies, and help you locate unusual plants, attractive rain gauges, or reasonably priced sundials.

Or, you can simply turn your back on good taste and respectability and either purchase a flock of pink flamingos or choose from one of the many catalogs featuring garden gnomes involved in mostly PG-rated activities.



The GreenMan Show is produced for County Cable Montgomery by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Office of Public Information. It airs daily on Cable Channel 6 and can also be

viewed on the Internet. For a complete schedule and online access, visit [www.greenmanshow.com](http://www.greenmanshow.com).

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